

PREFACE

The Scientific Group on Methodologies for the Safety Evaluation of Chemicals (SGOMSEC) met on 17–22 March 1996, at the Hanasaari Cultural Center in Espoo, Finland, as the guest of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The Scientific Group on Methodologies for the Safety Evaluation of Chemicals (SGOMSEC) was established in 1979 at the initiative of Professor Norton Nelson from New York University. SGOMSEC is a non-governmental organization sponsored by the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS), which was established within the World Health Organization (WHO) with the cooperation of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE), itself a body of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU).

The goals of this 12th SGOMSEC meeting were to assess the methodology involved in determining susceptibility to chemical and physical agents in the workplace or general environment and to explore the ethical issues involved. The focus on methodology is the hallmark of SGOMSEC workshops. In environmental studies we have the additional problem of differences in sensitivity between species to consider. The workshop topics chosen for evaluation by invited experts and SGOMSEC members are those of particular interest to governmental organizations and for which methodological issues are important in guiding decisions pertinent to protecting environmental health.

One of the oldest of human questions about disease is “why did this happen to me?” The rapid advances in molecular biology and in the scientific understanding of the mechanisms of disease causation have provided unparalleled opportunities to answer this question as it relates to individual susceptibility. Before any new approach can be supported or adopted for general use in protecting public health and the environment, it is crucial that the scientific methodologies be fully understood, including their limitations. Accordingly, the primary goal of the SGOMSEC

Workshop on Susceptibility to Environmental Hazards was to explore the current status and future directions of methodology pertinent to this area. In addition to considering the usual broad range of methodological issues related to susceptibility in humans and in ecosystems, for the first time SGOMSEC has included a specific chapter on ethical issues related to a methodology. There are many ethical aspects of knowledge concerning individual susceptibility, including such issues as the right of subjects to be informed, confidentiality, and the duties of the research.

On behalf of the members of SGOMSEC, we acknowledge with deep gratitude the hard work of many individuals whose contributions to SGOMSEC 12 were highly significant. We are particularly indebted to the two co-chairs, Harri Vainio of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and J. Carl Barrett of the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; to the SGOMSEC 12 participants; to Philippe Bourdeau of SCOPE, under whose leadership of SGOMSEC this meeting was planned; and, in particular, to the leadership and staff of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for their superb hospitality and highly professional support. Among those who deserve special thanks are Jorma Rantanen, Ari Hirvonen, Kirsti Husgavfel-Pursiainen, Raija Marttala, Hannu Norppa, and Anneli Vartio of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health; Sandy Sandberg and Terri Damstra of the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences; and Cecile Stapleton and Jean Wang of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute. We thank the U.S. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, the Commission of the European Communities, International Program on Chemical Safety, and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for financial support of this meeting.

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